

What if the Student is Not Progressing Within the Implementation Period?

After checking data charts, you realize your student is not progressing at a rate that will let her accomplish the IEP goal within the implementation period. What do you do? This question was posed to a group of teachers, and their insights and suggestions are compiled in this article. As you can see, many factors can contribute to this situation, and educators need to take a holistic approach to facilitating goal acquisition.

Data Collection

- Data should be collected at least weekly to check progress.
- Try collecting data several days for a week to see if that provides a clue to the reason for poor performance.
- Make sure the charting is being done correctly. Ensure the staff understands the testing process. Check for discrepancies between the results with various testers.
- Ensure the data collected matches the data in the IEP goal.
- When the data is transferred into a graphic format, see if it shows more clearly what is happening with the student. Does the student do better at certain times of the day?
- Determine what the data tells you. Flat data suggests a skills acquisition problem. Variable data (up and down) suggests a motivation problem.

Review Teaching Strategy

- Review the task analysis of the goal to see where the student is having a problem. Can the student achieve most of the goal but gets stuck on one or two steps? Examine the branching concept of task analysis.
- Determine what instructional adaptations are needed to help the student understand how to respond correctly.
- Determine if the task is too complex. Can the steps be broken down into smaller components of the essential skill? Focus teaching on the areas giving the student difficulty.
- Find out if all staff members understand the instructional process and if they are teaching the skill in the same way.
- Determine if the student is learning more easily with some staff members than others. For generalization of skills, the student should be able to achieve the goal with any staff member; however, during the learning phase, the student may achieve more consistent progress with one preferred staff person.

Prompts and Cues

- Provide prompts that are concrete enough to promote correct responses, and fade them out as quickly as possible.
- Find out if the staff is using language that is too wordy or difficult for the student to understand. Try slight changes in wording or tone of voice.

Materials and Adaptations

- Adapt materials in terms of size, position, color and shape, and make them age-appropriate.
- Some adaptations may become a permanent adaptation for the student.
- Use different materials.
- Position the student correctly for easy access to materials.
- Adapt the adaptations. You may need to be creative to meet the needs of the student. One teacher provided the most appropriate switch for a visually impaired student and positioned it so he had the best chance of hitting it with his natural arm.

- movement. It was necessary to add Play-Doh, netting and foam to the switch to increase his awareness of it and improve his grasping reflexes.
- Try different approaches to learning the skill. A student who was highly resistant to tooth-brushing and other oral motor stimulation was highly receptive to using an inexpensive battery-run toothbrush (idea provided by parent).

Reinforcers

- Determine if reinforcers need to be increased, decreased, changed or discontinued. Have a list of a minimum of 8-10 reinforcers for each student.
- Discover if the activity is reinforcing for this student. Each student has her own preferences and may not enjoy what other students or the classroom staff enjoy.
- Make the reinforcement readily available so the student understands the reinforcer is being given for a correct response.

General Ideas

- Change the location of the instruction. If the room is noisy or distracting, the student may not be able to perform the task.
- Use group instruction – many students prefer this method of learning.
- Allow the student to “help” other students or adults and learn in the process.
- Change the frequency of instruction. Increase the opportunities to practice the needed skill.
- Change the time of day for that instruction – select the student’s most receptive time.
- Increase the fun factor. Embed the skill acquisition into activities that stimulate the student.

Experiment With a New Approach

- Ask for help from other classroom staff in the school – share teaching skills.
- Ask for assistance with instruction from the building administrator or supervisor for instruction.
- Approach the physical, occupational or speech therapists for ideas.
- Find out from the parents what works at home.
- Read research relevant to that student’s needs and situation.

Medical Factors

Determine if any of the following factors are relevant to this student. Think about how you can help get the student back on track.

- Medical condition that is delaying skill acquisition.
- Recent prolonged absence from school.

Behavioral Factors

- Determine if the student is experiencing emotional/social changes (e.g., family situations, change of residence) and needs more behavioral support with demands decreasing and reinforcements increasing.
- Take into account if the student has behavioral or sensorimotor needs.

Testing After Implementing Changes

- Introduce one change, and track the resulting data. Note the date and nature of the change on the progress chart by using a change line. Track progress more frequently than once a week.
- If this does not produce sufficient change in progress, introduce another change and track. Be willing to revise ideas several times until you find the solution that works for that student.

Reconvene the IEP Team

- When all changes implemented have not resulted in significant progress, the team may have to revise the goal. It is possible the goal was not realistic when set.
- Make sure the skill is appropriate for this student. The goal should be a precise skill that is observable and measurable.
- Ensure the goal was written to demonstrate a skill rather than a specific activity or use of specific materials.

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